BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY: Arthur Akinaka, 75, civil engineer and former City and County Building Department Head

"In order to keep the plague from spreading, a part of Chinatown was burned in 1900. But the fire got out of control, and so many people were left homeless. Many of them moved to Kapalama. Chinese immigrants had already moved into Kapalama to cultivate taro. I recall from my early childhood that many Chinese farmers lived in the area Waikiki makai of where I grew up."

Arthur Akinaka, Japanese, was born in 1909 in Kapalama, Oahu. His mother, Haru Yokomizo, and father, Rinichi Akinaka, were immigrants from a sparsely-settled farming area in Hiroshima-ken, Japan. After arriving in Hawaii in 1906, Arthur's parents started a small tōfu factory in Honolulu. A short time later, a Mr. Harry Roberts of Kapalama employed the couple as caretakers of his estate.

Arthur grew up on Mr. Roberts' two-acre estate and attended nearby Kauluwela School, McKinley High School, and the University of Hawaii, graduating in 1930.

In 1931, he began an eight-year stint as a Federal employee, surveying outer-island harbors and working at Hickam Air Field. From 1938 to 1941, Arthur worked for the Territorial Planning Board and in June, 1941 opened his own engineering office. He remained in private practice for the rest of his career, except for four years (1951-1955) spent as Mayor John Wilson's Building Department head.

Arthur, a lifelong resident of Kapalama, still maintains an office on Houghtailing Street and actively participates in community activities.

Tape No. 11-4-1-83

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Arthur Y. Akinaka (AA)

December 6, 1983

Kapalama, Oahu

BY: Michiko Kodama (MK)

[NOTE: Edited by Mr. and Mrs. Arthur Akinaka, Velma Akinaka and Asa Akinaka.]

MK: This is an interview with Mr. Arthur Y. Akinaka (in) his office (at School and Houghtailing Streets) in Kapalama, Oahu, on December 6, 1983.

Okay, Mr. Akinaka, I'm going to open today's interview by having you discuss with me your parents' arrival and settling in Kapalama.

AA: My parents came here newly married in 1906 from the back farming area of Hiroshima Prefecture, Japan. They boarded (the steamer,) America-Maru, from Kobe and took a while (laughs) to reach here. Upon arrival they were met by my (uncle's business) partner at the wharf. They were encouraged by my uncle, who was operating a soda (water bottling) works with his partner, not to struggle at some sugar plantation, but to try to get started in Palama. So, knowing only one occupation, my mother, then age sixteen, my father, age nineteen, started a small tōfu factory (in the hopes of making) a living. Of course, the work was very hard. My sixteen-year-old mother had to get up two o'clock in the morning. And then, after the tōfu, aburage, and konnyaku were made, (my father) would carry (them in) cans around Palama. It was (only) a few months (later) that Judge (William) Rawlins, who owned that building at the intersection of Beretania and King Streets, saw my father (passing by daily) and asked (him) whether he would want to--together with my mother--move over to the premises of Mr. Harry Roberts, who was looking for a replacement (for) his (yard keeper), who was retiring to Japan. And so, that's how my parents moved (here) to (the corner of Houghtailing and School Streets,) where I was born.

It was a two-acre site, (where) Mr. Roberts, (after) his retirement from the Honolulu Advertiser (as) a commercial artist due to failing eyesight, (had) very thoroughly interested himself in horticulture. My earliest recollections (are of) this two-acre site. There were

quite a few (tropical fruit) trees of almost every variety. To sapodilla, sapote, soursop, sweetsop, and many varieties of mangoes. And there was a shallow well, (fitted) with a windmill, from which water to irrigate the plants was obtained. Besides that, we raised vegetables (and) raised chickens and (otherwise) helped with (assuring) the family subsistence.

(Mr. Roberts) was a man of refined tastes, having attended Oxford for one year. Like a lot of Europeans, (he immigrated) to the land of opportunity, America, and (in the East Coast) learned (to grind eyeglasses as an occupation). After a while, (he) tired of that and went further westward down towards Galveston and Corpus Cristi, Texas, where for a while (he worked) in commercial fishing. He was (always) interested in music and drawing, (and so when) he gave up fishing (and) moved to San Francisco, he got employment as a commercial artist. (While there), an aunt who passed away in London left him a small inheritance. So, (in 1893) he decided to come to Hawaii and (was able to find) employment as a commercial artist with the Honolulu Advertiser. But with failing eyesight, he retired to this two-acre site, (pursuing his) interest in horticulture.

MK: At that time, what was this area called?

AA: This area has always been known as the makai portion of Kapalama. Kapalama extended from the mountain to the sea. The Kamehameha Schools (are located in the mauka portion of Kapalama).

MK: Going back a little bit, I was wondering what your mother's name was and what your father's name was.

AA: Oh, yes, (chuckles) yes. My mother's name was Haru Yokomizo and my father's name was Rinichi Akinaka. They were next-door neighbors in a sparsely settled farming area. Before they could leave Japan to better their economic circumstances, their parents felt (it) best that they should get married.

MK: And they arrived in Hawaii in 1906?

AA: Correct.

MK: How soon after that were you born?

AA: I was born in 1909.

MK: And at that time, were you born at home?

AA: Yes, I was born on (these) very premises.

MK: So, after being born here, what was the surrounding area like as you remember it as a boy?

AA: As I remember it, both School Street and Houghtailing Road were

dirt roads. School Street extended (Ewa only) as far as Kalihi Street, and Kalihi Street went up into Kalihi Valley. In the Waikiki direction--this was before McInerny Tract was subdivided--there (were) a (few) scattered houses. The first (sizable improvement) was the insane asylum (on the present site of) the Hawaii Housing [Authority]. And beyond that were, on both sides, taro patches until one got near Liliha Street. Liliha Street was quite urbanized, as (was) School Street beyond (Liliha and toward Nuuanu Street). (For myself,) I began attending Kauluwela School, which began from nine o'clock [a.m.] until two o'clock [p.m.]. And since my parents could (then) speak only their mother tongue, they sent us to Japanese-language school, which was a little further beyond Kauluwela School on Nuuanu Street.

MK: And what do you remember the most about attending Kauluwela School between, say, 1915 and 1923?

AA: It (was) quite interesting to meet up with schoolchildren from near the school site, mostly from mauka of School (Street), as well as down on Vineyard, Kukui Street, all the way toward King Street. They were far more urbanized than I was. In fact, I was looked on as more of a country boy and was finding it difficult to make too many new friends. Of course, there were always boys that are friendly to you, but by and large, I minded myself and studied, which was what my parents and also Mr. Roberts emphasized.

It might interest you to know that in 1917, Queen Lili'uokalani passed away. Of course, that would have made me eight years old. I walked all the way to Nuuanu Street to witness the funeral procession that laid the Queen to rest up Nuuanu Mausoleum.

MK: What was that procession like, as you witnessed it?

AA: It was a long parade consisting of elderly Hawaiians leading the procession. Then, there was the funeral cortege. And outside of that, I don't remember too much.

MK: As a boy of eight years old, did you realize the significance of her death?

AA: Yes, in a way, because my next-door neighbors were all kama'āina (part-)Hawaiian families. (The Houghtailings were next door and the Leslie and Taylor families across the road.) While I had to put more of my time helping out with the family chores, like watering the trees and the vegetable garden and feeding the chickens, what time I (had) to go out and play (was spent) with those neighbor children. So that's the sort of a environment that I was accustomed to, so Queen Lili'uokalani's procession was, in my way of looking at life, just part of the community environment.

MK: You mentioned earlier that you were influenced by your parents and by Mr. Roberts. Can you explain how he influenced you in your life?

AA: Yes. When we were born, my parents were a little concerned whether Mr. Roberts wanted children (laughs) around. So they (worried that they) might have to seek other employment. But Mr. Roberts, being a retired bachelor, did welcome having children grow up around him. And as I grew up, he (took the time) to teach me things that he was adept in. For example, in drawing, I remember (trying when I was eight years old) to copy a newspaper profile of Abraham Lincoln. (Mr. Roberts) would take it and show me how the facial features should be drawn. Or else, when he had his regular music afternoons, I would go over to his house to hear him play the violin. (He played second violin with the city symphony orchestra those years.) He would try to encourage (chuckles) me to also take up music. But I was poor in keeping time, so I never did show that much interest in music. But drawing (fascinated me). (At) McKinley High, I was the school [news]paper cartoonist (and) one of the art editors on the school annual.

MK: I noticed in your outline of your life, you attended Kauluwela School from 1915 to 1923, and then McKinley from 1923 to 1926. As a student at McKinley, what types of activity did you participate in, besides being the art editor for your annual?

AA: I didn't have time for other activities, because after (English) school, (I also) attended (Japanese) language school. So, it was only after I started going to (the) University [of Hawaii] that I (had time for other activities).

MK: I was wondering, that language school that you attended that was located at Nuuanu, what was its name and what do you remember about that language school most vividly?

AA: That language school was on Nuuanu Street, halfway between School and Vineyard [Streets] on premises which now have been taken over by Foster Gardens. It was known as Japanese Central Institute and was started by those (first-generation Japanese) who were Christians. (I recall Rev. Takie Okumura. I also recall that the majority of the teachers were women who in those earlier years were dressed in kimono and hakama, and remember them as all pleasant, dedicated and very kind.)

However, when Palama Gakuen was built, in my sixth year of language school, I moved to that school (since it was nearer to home). From there, I continued at Hongwanji [Japanese-language (high) school] on Fort Street. So, I have had ten years of Japanese schooling to a degree where I began to (understand) Japanese culture.

MK: Can you tell me why you decided to go to the University?

AA: Well, my mother had jogakkō or middle school education. My father, being the only child and having to leave school after only four years of grammar school education (to tend the family farm,) felt very strongly about all his children at least getting as good education

as he could afford. So, there was no question that we (should) continue (on to) college (if we could).

MK: What were your hopes at that time as you entered the University?

AA: When I entered University, I thought I should try to take up pre-medicine. But I came to the (early) conclusion that our family finances would not permit (my) being financed through a Mainland medical school, (and) so I shifted to something (in) which I could graduate in (four years) and make a living. So, from one year of pre-medical courses such as chemistry, zoology and botany, I shifted over to whatever engineering subjects they would allow me to take. It was a constant [effort] trying to catch up.

I'm very grateful with the teachers (and principals) that I had all through grammar school, high school and university, and how they helped me appreciate the value of a good education and being a good citizen. Dean [Arthur] Keller, for instance, I would ask him for gainful employment around the campus and (chuckles) he kept me busy wherever he could. In my senior year, as I found my predecessors were allowed to take out the freshmen engineering students in surveying work, I felt I might qualify and I had the privilege of being a student assistant on the instructional staff of the University and took out the freshmen surveying students (to train them) in the fundamentals of surveying (field work). Prior to that, (through) one of the professors who had been president of Kamehameha Schools, I did have summer employment at Bishop Estate. From among his students, he selected (one) to work on the (surveying crew) to (delineate the boundaries) for the Bishop Estate, (of) a cattle ranch where (Hawaii Kai) now is, following the top of the ridge and down the two valleys surrounding the pond as it used to be. I was selected, and that summer, worked for Bishop Estate.

MK: So, even before you got your degree from the University in 1930, you were already experiencing some employment as a surveyor or engineer.

AA: Yes.

MK: Then, once you did graduate, what was your first employment?

AA: I graduated in 1930 after the disastrous 1929 stock crash and work was hard to come by. I had always wanted to go into building construction because in that field there were, perhaps, better opportunities. Engineering (was) not (then) open to too many Orientals. But then, the (contracting) firm I (started with) had a very minimum salary [and] was not able to even (chuckles) pay that salary.

So it was fortunate that I had, at the University, taken up advanced (R.O.T.C.) [Reserve Officers' Training Corps] training (and) upon graduation had (received) a (reserve) commission in the Army. The Corps of Engineers here needed (an additional) young man (for) their

staff. The major in charge of the local office took a liking (to me) and hired me. So, I worked for five years (with the) Corps of Engineers on harbor work. But then, come the year '35, (and) with increasing war consciousness, it was (thought) better that I stay back instead of being assigned to the (more sensitive) Pacific islands. (I was transferred) laterally to Hickam Field (where a military airfield was to be built).

But after eight years (with the) Federal civil service I shifted over (in 1938) to the first Territorial Planning Board. But that office closed in three years (in 1941) with (the imminence) of war.

MK: I was wondering, what was the function of that Territorial Planning Board?

AA: Yes, very good question. There was (then) a national trend (in long-range planning) among the forty-eight states; all of them had state planning boards. Each one of those state planning boards prepared reports similar to the one I was showing you. At that time (for the territory,) it was desirable to make an inventory of the resources--(geographic), social, economic, and industrial. So, using (Mainland state reports) as a pattern, the Territory of Hawaii made its own report. One of the important things about statewide planning is (that) unless it is implemented subsequently with (projects and funding) it (soon is) forgotten and filed away on shelves.

MK: Were any of the plans developed by the Territorial Planning Board ever implemented in the Territory?

AA: The data was, I noticed over the years, (utilized) every now and then. But we were never able to advance anything into the actual construction planning stage. Planning is (a time consuming, group effort). And (its success) depends on how much interest any specific plan (can) generate. (Planning can be very frustrating. I prefer civil engineering and construction.)

MK: So, anyway, after you worked for the Territorial Planning Board, you opened up your own engineering firm in June 1941. How did that come about?

AA: The Territorial Planning Board was a creature of the Legislature. The Legislature, realizing that war (was) imminent, decided there was not the need to put (further) human resources to further planning. So, that office was closed in June 1941. And rather than try to, in a frustrating manner, make a go in the government service with a career, I was advised, being still young, to try my luck out on my own. That's how I started out.

MK: How were you able to start that company then, in 1941?

AA: Well, I started a one-man office and made my rounds doing my PR

[public relations] and seeking work assignments. But when (laughs) December 7 came around. . . . I, having a reserve commission, approaching earning a captaincy, volunteered to (join) the military right (after) the Pearl Harbor (attack). But since my father and my younger brother (were) in Japan, (I was) not (a) welcome volunteer.

In trying to keep myself busy, one of the fellow haole engineers who worked side by side with me (years back), by then, had a very important assignment. He had persuaded me to come back to work in a sensitive assignment, but then such sensitive assignments were not open to those of us of our ancestry. So, he encouraged me to do construction to keep me busy during the war, which I did, and I carried it on until even five years after the war.

MK: What do you remember about the war years in this vicinity?

AA: Well, December 7, I was doing a little engineering assignment in the basement of my house, being Sunday. When I went out to the grocery store and did see all this commotion of automobiles going Ewa, I did ask the policeman at a corner what's occurring. And he was rude enough to look at me as if, (where was) I? (Laughs)

The war years, I was kept quite busy running a construction outfit, so there isn't much to talk about.

MK: Do you remember anything about the rationing, or blackout or neighborhood units in this Kapalama area?

AA: Well, I was so preoccupied with war emergency construction--in fact, I put in long hours--so that I didn't have very much time for other things.

MK: What did your war emergency construction involve?

AA: Well, the first year, we, together with couple other construction firms, produced these sixteen-men pre-fabricated (military) housing units. (Our company) must have produced a thousand of (them), which were fabricated in that block, (then a large empty lot), just makai of Blaisdell Center. Army units would come, with their trucks, and haul (them away) and assemble (them) wherever they were assigned. And then, with that first year program over, came construction of warehouses, office additions, (a) cold storage building, hospital additions, all of which kept me busy. As I take inter-island plane trips and fly over [the island], I notice next to the airport, still standing and in use, many of the warehouses that (we) had built.

MK: Oh, they stood the test of time.

(Laughter)

MK: So, you were very busy during those war years.

AA: Yes, very busy.

END OF SIDE ONE

SIDE TWO

MK: Okay, Mr. Akinaka, we're speaking about the post-war years. You were telling me earlier that you ran for office in 1948. Can you discuss that event with me?

AA: I ran for the Senate. There were six of us, and (chuckles) I didn't qualify with the first three, but I didn't (chuckles) come in last. It [the campaign] was a last-minute assignment. It was not something which I had preplanned and programmed.

But as a result of that, I guess I won the respect of Mayor [John H.] Wilson. He invited me to succeed a department head who had reached compulsory retirement age. [But] at that time [because the position was] only a two-year appointment, requiring me to give up my business because it was too related, I had to thank the mayor and (chuckles) refuse it. My business was something I had built up over a period of close to ten years. But when I went to see the mayor after, he told me to think it over. He (said), "Arthur, you are privileged to be an American citizen, and with it, you have had the benefit of public education and protection in police, health, and so on." He would think, (that) when (one were) asked--and not many people get asked--there should be but one answer. And my answer to him (chuckles) was, irrespective of the way I felt, "Yes, sir."

(Laughter)

MK: So, from (1951) to (1955), you served two terms as a building (department) head. Then, in the 1960s, you were involved in the Model Cities Program as a volunteer from the community. Nowadays, you're in private engineering business.

AA: Yes. I might mention, (when it was organized in 1962,) Oahu Development Conference invited (me) to (serve as a) member, (as I still do). (Also,) I have (served) continuously since 1947 (on the building and grounds committee of Kuakini Hospital).

MK: I also notice that you served on the Kalihi Palama Council?

AA: Yes, (it grew out) of (the) Palama Businessmen's Association, (which was sponsored by Palama Settlement soon after World War II). Shunzo Sakamaki, who was a member and who served for many years on the Board of Trustees of Palama Settlement, (thought) that the time (was) ripe (for) Kalihi Palama (to) have a community council. He helped organize it and (invited) me and also Say Nakata (to join).

(Over the years that) I've been with that organization, (I have tried to assist in its programs) whenever my experience (was needed).

MK: You mentioned earlier that you have your own thoughts about how land should be readjusted. I was wondering, based on your professional expertise and your own knowledge of this community, what do you think should be done in the future for Kalihi Palama?

AA: First, (I believe that) those who (are responsbile for implementing the City's) master plans and development plans should (familiarize) themselves (with) the land readjustment movement that has been taking place in the Asian countries, Australia and Germany. (This process which is incorporated into their statutes is) an alternative to urban renewal as we know of it in the United States (and the dislocations which often accompany it). Now, an excellent book has recently been published (by a Harvard professor) which I (believe) should be (carefully studied by our) policy makers. And the name of the game (would) be public-private partnership (in collaborating) together to see such (physical community) improvements taking place, with the responsibility on the municipality to inform and educate the property owners, many of whom have other more immediate, higher priority responsibilities they want to put their efforts in. I think newspapers might, especially the Sunday section, be used as a medium of disseminating information.

And what is a best possible process is not necessarily the way they do it elsewheres, but what is most appropriate here, using such (technical) resources as we have (here) in the private sector (in land consolidation and resubdivision, and) with follow-up by the municipality and participation of the property owners. We would have a very, I would think, viable program where we would help with the housing shortage. (We all) see (now) families in (deteriorating) one-story houses (and) living on small lots. Ways and means can be evolved so that such property owners can (by consolidating their parcels with adjoining parcels) have up to, say, three (story housing units) built, with quarters for themselves and space for two more families. I'm sure these present aging owners, instead of unloading such present lots as is and hoping the youngsters can do something about it, can bring about such improvements with the endorsement of the younger generation (and heirs).

MK: I've noticed that you've lived in Kalihi from the time you were born, so you've seen many, many changes. You're also aware of Kalihi's early historical background. So, now that we've already talked about what you hope for the future, can you kind of review for me what you know about Kalihi's historical background?

AA: Yes, I'd be very happy to because the present and the future can never be fully (appreciated without some reference to the past). Towards the end of the last century, (Honolulu suffered an epidemic of) bubonic plague. In order to keep the plague from spreading, a (part) of Chinatown (was) burned [in 1900]. But (the fire) got out

of control, and so many people were left homeless. (Many of them moved to Kapalama.) Chinese migrants (had already) moved into Kapalama (to cultivate taro). (I recall from) my earlier childhood (that many Chinese farmers lived in the area Waikiki makai (of where I grew up).

(In answer to the) housing shortage (at the) beginning (of) this century, (a number of new) subdivisions (opened up) in this area. (The new developments first concentrated along King Street which was served by a trolley line.) I recently (made) a quick review of those (subdivisions) as they were entered chronologically (in the Government Survey Office). And it might be interesting to note that. . . . See, all these are tract names, you know. They are alphabetically arranged, but by years. So, I went over to survey office and compiled two and a half pages (in) all, including Kalihi and Kapalama. Now, to (summarize the) subdivisions in zone one, that is, (in) Kalihi and Palama and from the mountain to the sea, and by (the) periods (in which) they were opened up. Prior to 1900, there were ten; between 1901 [and 1910], there were ten. The bulk of them, (forty, occurred from) 1911 to 1920. And 1921 to date, seventeen. (In all there have been about) a hundred (subdivisions, large and small). The bulk of the development took place (early).

MK: Nineteen-eleven to 1920.

AA: Yes. That's when the migration from the plantations took place. That's when the Japanese moved in and (later) the Filipinos moved in. Now, the Samoans are moving in.

MK: After you did this tabulation, did you notice which groups came in earlier to Kalihi?

AA: The earliest were the Chinese. Except the Hawaiians (who) already lived here. Then came the (Portuguese and) Japanese.

MK: The other day you mentioned that Bishop Estate was somehow involved in this early urban development?

AA: Oh, yes.

MK: What was Bishop Estate's role in this?

AA: Kalihi Palama is very fortunate that (the) Kamehameha Schools were (established) during the monarchy in this area--(around) Bishop Museum. (Kalihi Palama early became) a cultural center.

MK: The urbanization of Kalihi then, started in the early 1900s and was developed even more so from 1911 to 1920, then.

AA: Yes, that was the peak. McInerny Tract, (which is mauka from here,) its vintage is 1914, (when) it was (surveyed and subdivided). And

(in) 1915 the (first people such as the) Takei (family) and others moved in.

MK: Which tract is the oldest in this vicinity?

AA: The older tracts (were) not in this vicinity [but] toward Liliha and Nuuanu. Down here, the earlier tracts were (in) Palama; and then in the Kalihi area, around Susannah Wesley Home. Quite a few small subdivisions were (done).

MK: During those first years of the century, were there such things as zoning laws that restricted the types of lifestyles that people could carry on?

AA: Territory was annexed in 1898 and it took a little while for the territorial government to get organized. (Further), it took little more time for the city government to get organized. Now, the city government originally occupied the (two-story building at the) mauka Ewa corner of King and Alakea (Streets). That constituted City Hall. And I was looking (into), while I was city hall department head, the laws that governed construction of buildings. Honolulu had its own building code. It was more (for the protection of health and) for the protection against fire. As to how lots were subdivided was not (that much of) a major issue. It was only after the '20s that such (municipal body) as a planning commission came into existence. And they started (planning for the future and for) what the future generations would demand (including zoning). Over the years, (planning has) become more and more refined and complex, and for us (as citizens), so time consuming (in striving) to keep up (with those planning full-time).

MK: You know, when you were a young man, a young boy, you lived sort of an agrarian lifestyle. Were the other children in this area also experiencing that kind of lifestyle?

AA: I think we were exceptions, (yes). Some of the children who were--not born (here), but who moved into and lived in McInerny Tract (in) house lots. The Chinese who farmed mostly were bachelors. Except there were two families. One was the Auyong family and the other one was the Lau Yick family. Lau Yick was doing vegetable gardening, and then they (bettered) themselves economically and established a corner grocery store here. The Auyongs (settled) here as truck farmers. As I grew up, I used to, once in a while, leave our yard and go down where they used to live. The old man spoke good Hawaiian, which was the way he and I could communicate (in a very limited way) because I (can't) speak Chinese. Most of his children are deceased. But there's one--Mrs. (Daisy) Fun Luke, who lives up in Nuuanu someplace--who may be willing to make an input. I never used to keep too good a track of the girls (laughs).

MK: You mentioned a rice mill [during the preliminary interview].

AA: Yes, that rice mill, according to Mr. Say Nakata, whose father used to operate it, was way down the waterfront. After a while, California rice was imported and was of equal or better quality, so they discontinued importing rice from Japan. So, there were millers who imported rice and furnished wholesalers (here).

MK: Also, in your youth, do you remember anything about cane fields in this vicinity, or. . . .

AA: Yes. All this area (on Bishop Estate land), perhaps as close to 500 feet from where we live (and) all the way over to almost Auld Lane, and including the area makai of King Street. (King Street passed through) in the middle. . . . Yes, when I was six years old, already there was a cane field. And right (in the middle) of the cane field along King Street, they had those big billboards. There were about three separate billboards alongside. The movie houses used to advertise the movie stars (of) their silent movie (era), like Mary Pickford, (Douglas Fairbanks), Charles Ray, and Fatty Arbuckle, and Nazimova (laughs).

MK: Did you attend any of those silent movies?

AA: Well, my father was persuaded in having stock with my Sunrise Soda uncle in a Beretania Theater [which was located at] where Maunakea Street (now) extends over to Kukui Street. I remember that summer, when I had to take one extra course during the summer to be able to get a high school diploma (in three years), I took on evening employment running the movie machine and during the daytime, cleaning the theater.

MK: You know, I've heard of a Kalihi Theater. Was there ever a Kalihi Theater?

AA: Yes. Kalihi Theater building, I think, is still in existence. It was just at the corner of Puuhale and King Street on the makai side. That was Kalihi Theater. And (nearer), there was another theater called Victory Theater, which was just past Kalihi Street on the makai side of King Street. (And) when you went (down) to Palama, there was a small theater where now the Palama Theater is (along King Street). It was a tin-roofed affair (long demolished). And the other Palama theater over (there) was closer to Dillingham Boulevard intersection on the makai side (also long torn down). So, there (were then) two theaters in Palama.

MK: So, if one had money, one could go to a movie in this vicinity?

AA: Yes, it was ten cents admission.

MK: That was about when?

AA: Oh, this was 1920s, all of 1920s.

MK: As a youth, did you ever participate or go to spectator sports in this Kalihi or Kapalama vicinity?

AA: There was, after a while, in the cane fields makai of King Street, a boxing arena [Houston Arena]. I think if you had to point it out today, it would fall right in Kapalama Canal.

(Laughter)

MK: Really? Were they professional boxers that boxed there?

AA: Oh, yes. They had the best boxers perform there.

MK: In your long years here in Kalihi, what do you think has been the most dramatic changes?

AA: Well, this constantly changing composition of the residents. The old-timers either relocate or leave this good earth. And mostly because they better, sometimes, their economic status. The other thing is living here in the substandard lot sizes and deteriorating neighborhood. No one individual can do very much towards modernizing, but ends up just perpetuating what is handed down. And that is not too appealing to the younger generation.

MK: You've lived here all your life. What made you stay here in Kalihi?

AA: Attachment to the parcel that I was born [on], primarily. Free of those deficiencies that other parcels have. I live on a very spacious (lot). And it's a complete package. This (portion) is a business zone. But then, this is not (all satisfactory) for a younger generation. My son is (continuing the engineering practice as president now and) moving out (to more central larger quarters).

MK: As your closing remarks at this interview, what are your feelings as a longtime Kalihi resident?

AA: Well, I'm thankful to have been born in this point in time (and not during previous times). When (I was) a youngster, my mother had to prepare food on wood stoves and (I) had to chop (kiawe) firewood (and thence there was) the gradual changeover to kerosene stove and kerosene lamps. When I was born and for many years, we had no electricity, no drinking water. But with McInerny Tract (being opened up), water (mains) came in, sewers came in, electric system came in. More than that, (now) look at what you can enjoy--TV, and I'm of an age where I (can) now enjoy grandchildren. As long as I hold this fort down--I use (chuckles) the word "fort," (other family members now dispersed,) friends and others know where to look me up. And I don't have to worry about policemen looking me up.

(Laughter)

AA: (However, the neighborhood needs to be improved by the residents, and vandalism and crime be reduced. This is a constant challenge for the present and future.)

MK: So, Mr. Akinaka, is there anything else you would like to record for posterity right now?

AA: Oh, unless you have questions, I think I have (covered the subject matter sufficiently). And I would appreciate the opportunity to, after you've edited, review and include [any corrections] where I (may not) have not been too articulate in my presentation.

MK: Thank you for today.

END OF INTERVIEW

KALIHI:
Place of Transition

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